

## Our Stories—Emily Jacobs

Emily Jacobs is not unhappy being at home during the Pandemic. She had planned some recovery time following major foot surgery which turned into more time at home after she fell and fractured the same foot, requiring more surgery. This brings to four the total number of surgeries necessary to repair a serious bunion and the resultant hammer toes and the removal of the sesamoid bones from the ball of her foot. She is watching a lot of movies and documentaries. She loves to learn new things and is taking this time to Google things and binge-watch without guilt. Life is good for her and Mark, her husband of 33 years.

Born in North Dakota, Emily moved a lot as a child, attending five elementary schools and three junior high schools. Her mother, single following a divorce when Emily was four years old, first pursued a Master's Degree in Educational Theatre from ND State University, and then received her PhD in theatre from the University of Oregon, in Eugene. She taught theatre, designed costumes and occasionally performed, moving her family to follow the best opportunities—from Bismarck to Fargo to Oakland, CA, Eugene OR, Cincinnati, OH, Ashland, OR and back to Eugene, before finally landing a teaching position at the RI Junior College, (now CCRI). They moved initially to East Greenwich—a big culture shock and blow for Emily, having moved from uber-liberal Eugene. (Her only sibling, older by eight years, had moved out at 18, and belonged to a cult for 10 or so years.) Emily's mother was an early and ardent feminist with far leftist political views—an anomaly in EG. (Emily recalls having to hide her first bra from her mother). School in EG was particularly painful after attending an experimental junior high in Eugene where students selected their own classes from a massive liberal arts curriculum. After spending a miserable, lonely eighth grade year in EG, (literally zero friends she says) they moved to Warwick to be closer to the college. Emily would walk to the college after school where she was befriended and influenced (sometimes negatively) by her mother's students.

After high school Emily moved to the East Side of Providence where she worked at many jobs, many of which she was fired from. She was admittedly a horrible employee. She fell in love with a chef, with whom she moved to FL. After living with the chef for 4 years, Emily returned to RI in order to take advantage of the tuition-free education at the state schools that her mother's job provided. She took every performance class that she could at CCRI and then went on to do the same at RIC. Emily acted in many productions at this time. At a show produced in Newport she met and fell in love with Mark, who was born and raised there. They immediately became an item despite the raised eyebrow of his very Catholic mother.

Two and a half years later as they were planning their wedding Mark was asked to temporarily fill a position in Morris county, NJ. They first lived in a hotel in Morristown and continued the preparations from afar. In the month prior to the wedding both Mark's father and Emily's grandfather passed away. The wedding was a joyful affair amidst stressful circumstances. The temporary stay in New Jersey turned into 27 ½ years. They settled in Mercer County where their two children, Brianna, now 29 and Dakota, 25 were born and raised and it wasn't until 2015 that the couple found their way back to RI.

Though Emily was baptized a Presbyterian, when her mother divorced they stopped attending church. Emily, though, always yearned for a spiritual connection. In fourth grade she wanted to join a friend and become a Mormon. Her mother forbade it and told her that the only choices if she

insisted upon attending church were the Quaker Church or the Unitarian Church. In the fifth grade she wanted to become a Jew. In the sixth grade she befriended another Mormon girl and was again drawn to the welcoming, family-centric religion. Her mother relented this time and allowed her to attend Mormon services, but after three months they moved yet again, thus ending her stint in “church shopping.” They returned to the agnostic way of life.

When Emily and Mark found their stay in NJ to be more long term they began a search for a church that would work for them both. The Unitarian Universalist Church was a good fit. They attended three different UU churches during their years in NJ and finding a congregation that they liked was an important part of their search for a new home in RI. After choosing Wakefield and UUCSC Emily soon joined the choir. She also performed with a jazz trio at a Taste of Garden City in 2016 and has been singing with The Chorus of Westerly since spring 2019.

For 14 years she taught children’s theatre in Princeton. It wasn’t until Emily was thirty-nine that she returned to school. Of the 57 credits that she had amassed in singing, dancing and acting at CCRI and RIC, only 9 were accepted for her degree program. She received her bachelor’s degree from Thomas Edison State College. She attended graduate school at The College of NJ, where she received her K-12 NJ Certificate of Ed. for teaching ESL. Emily prefers teaching adults and once back in Rhode Island she taught both immigrants and the family members of attendees of the Naval War College at the Aquidneck Island Adult Learning Center until 2018. She has also taught Spanish and even French. She is currently tutoring a student online from Geneva, Switzerland.

Emily was diagnosed with a major depressive disorder in 1992 and it wasn’t until 25 years later in 2017 that the diagnosis was changed to Bipolar Disorder. The extreme highs and lows of mania and depression require medication to maintain stability and the diagnosis has been extremely difficult for Emily to accept. She receives disability due to the inconsistencies of the disease. (Emily has held **well** over sixty jobs in her life!!!) It was only in this past year that Emily realized that the long, bright days of summer actually contribute to her mood disorder. With the goal of acceptance in mind, Emily and Mark celebrated the Autumn Equinox on September 21st by going to the Fisherman’s Memorial at the Camp Cronin site to watch the sunset. The night was beautiful. She now considers the equinoxes her personal holidays.

*Elizabeth Donovan, December 2020*